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HIST 209  
Salem Witch Trials

**“The Devil Doth Hinder His Words”  
The Rise and Fall of Samuel Wardwell**

Even in the insanity known as the witch trials of 1692, the case of Samuel Wardwell stands out as distinctly peculiar. A carpenter by trade, he spent his spare time predicting the fortunes of his neighbors. At the height of the trials, he not only confessed but implicated others, going so far as to interrogate them at their examination. Yet something happened, and as the date of his trial drew near, Samuel recanted, even though the time for claims of innocence had certainly passed. Unfortunately, those who had witnessed his previous fervor refused to believe him, and Samuel Wardwell went down in American history as the only accused person in the witch scare of 1692 to recant a confession and still be executed. Even though the case of Samuel Wardwell contains aspects typical of New England witchcraft cases in 1692, his unusual behavior toward the end of his life makes his case unique.

Samuel Wardwell was born on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1643 in Exeter, New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup> The youngest in the family, Samuel’s early life was colored by the turmoil surrounding his father. Though Thomas Wardwell was originally admitted to the Boston church in 1634, his decision to follow the teachings of Anne Hutchinson caused him to be dismissed from

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<sup>1</sup> Pope, Charles Henry. *Pioneers of Maine and New Hampshire, 1623 to 1660*. Boston, MA: C.H. Pope, 1908, 222. Robinson, Enders A. *Salem Witchcraft and Hawthorne’s House of the Seven Gables*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1992, 46.

the Massachusetts congregation, forcing him to join a church in Exeter in 1639.<sup>2</sup> Samuel was not able to lay claim to being the only persecuted member of his family; his brother Eliakim's wife Lydia was lashed with a whip in Hampton, New Hampshire for being a Quaker.<sup>3</sup>

After completing his apprenticeship in carpentry, Samuel followed his brother Benjamin to Salem in order to take advantage of the its growing mercantile trade.<sup>4</sup> In Salem he married his first wife, an unidentified woman who would give him Thomas, his first-born son, before dying in 1671. After her death, Samuel decided to relocate to Andover in order to start anew.<sup>5</sup>

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1672, Samuel Wardwell (recorded as Wardle) married Sarah Hawke, a widow whose maiden name was Hooper. Sarah would give him six children, five of whom would live to adulthood.<sup>6</sup> Samuel continued practicing carpentry, and the family lived in fairly comfortable means within the town.<sup>7</sup> Although they did not live in one of

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<sup>2</sup> Bell, Charles H. *History of the Town of Exeter, New Hampshire*. 1888. Rev. ed. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1979, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Mass. Historical Society 1st Series Vol. 18:390.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Dignan, Brendan. "Samuel Wardwell." *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, Spring Semester 2001;. Robinson, Enders A. *Salem Witchcraft and Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables*, New York : Hippocrene Books, 1991. Research into the existence of a first wife is limited to these two sources, although the existence of a son THOMAS led to the inclusion of the theory into the paper.

<sup>6</sup> *Vital Records of Andover, Massachusetts*. "Marriages: Surnames Staring with W and Y." The Topsfield Historical Society, Topsfield, MA 1912. Listed as: "WARDLE (see also Wardwell) :Samuell, and Sara Hawkes, wid., Jan. 9, 1672." <http://www.rays-place.com/town/ma/andover/and-marr-w.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds. *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/ot2www-salemname?specfile=/texts/english/salem/public/salem.o2w&act=text&offset=7387483&query=warsam&textreg=div3>, *Mass. Archives* Vol. 135 No. 140. In 1710, Samuel Wardwell Jr. petitioned the "Honourable Committee Sitting in Salem" for the property

the many clusters of homes that comprised the town of Andover, it appears from later testimony that the Wardwells interacted most with those living in the center cluster of the town, just up the road from their home.<sup>8</sup>

On September 1, 1692, Samuel and his family found themselves thrown into the midst of the witch trials.<sup>9</sup> William Barker Jr. led the charge of witchcraft, implicating “Sam’ll Wardwel his wife & two Daughters” as having been his companions in afflicting Martha Sprague, age sixteen year old.<sup>10</sup>

At the time, Samuel Wardwell did not fight the accusations. Rather, his confession came the same day as his interrogation. In his formal examination, he admitted to being “foolishly Led along with telling of fortunes, which sometyes came to pass” and “being sensible in the snare of the devil.” He continued on, admitting that when he saw an animal in his field he “bid the devil take it, and it may be the devil took advantage of him by that.” He claimed that the devil came to him in the form of a black man, calling

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seized at his parents’ capture. The property is listed as “ 5 cows a 2 P 10-00-00, 1 Heifer & a yearling 2-5-00, 1 Horse 3-0-00, 9 Hogs 7-0-0, 8 Loads of Hay 4-0-0, A set of Carpenters Tools 1-10-0, 6 Acres of corn upon the ground 9-00-00.”

<sup>8</sup> Batchelder, James S., Rockwell, Forbes, Mahony, Gratia. “ Large Map of Andover, 1692.” Map: According to Batchelder’s depiction and Rockwell and Mahony’s research, the Wardwells lived down the street from a cluster of houses surrounding the meeting house and the center of town. Living within the cluster is Thomas Chandler (located in Wid.Johnson house), the Martin family (Abigail, although not confirmed), John Bridges, John Abbott, John Aslebee, Richard Barker, and Dudley Bradstreet. Joseph Ballard is outside of the cluster, but closer to Wardwell than the center of town.

<sup>9</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum. <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/ot2www-salemname?specfile=/texts/english/salem/public/salem.o2w&act=text&offset=6591512&textreg=div2&query=warsam>, Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 2 Page 56, [http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/archives/essex/ecca/vol2/large/055\\_0001.jpg](http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/archives/essex/ecca/vol2/large/055_0001.jpg), <http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/archives/essex/ecca/vol1/056.html>

<sup>10</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum. <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/ot2www-salemname?specfile=/texts/english/salem/public/salem.o2w&act=text&offset=986726&query=warsam&textreg=div3>

himself the “prince of the aire” and admitted that “he should never want for any thing but that the black man had never performed any thing.” While his method for making a covenant with the devil was typical of 1692 New England cases, his narration contains a unique characteristic:

he syned his book by makeing a mark like a square  
with a black pen and that the devil brought him the  
pen and Ink He saith further he Covenanted with the  
devil untill he should arryve to the age of sixty years<sup>11</sup>

Stating his age as 46 when he entered this confession into record, the contract that he claimed he made twenty years prior would be only good for another fourteen years.<sup>12</sup>

Wardwell’s confession the day he was interrogated soon caused a shift in his role in the trials, as he began to follow the lead of his accuser. In his confession, he stated that “mary Lilly and Hannah Tayler of Ridding” were members of his company of witches.<sup>13</sup> It appears that Wardwell’s decision to name these fellow witches was also due to their dealings with part of his family, although the family in this instance was that of his wife’s, the Hoopers.

Samuel Wardwell’s troubles with local families did not end with the Hoopers, as he also had a long and checkered history with the Barker family. Brendan Dignan claims that William’s cousin Sarah had carried on a love affair with the carpenter twenty years earlier until it was halted by her father Richard.<sup>14</sup> However, no Sarah Barker older than

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<sup>11</sup> Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 2 p. 55

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 156. While Wardwell’s confession of a time stamp was unusual, it was not unique. Abigail Hobbs claims to have made a contract for 2 or 3 years in her examination, changing it thereafter to 4 years.

<sup>14</sup> Dignan; Robinson, 59. Massachusetts Town Marriage Records,  
<http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&f1=Richard&f0=Barker&=&f3Day=&f3Month=&f3Year=16&f4=&>

the age of thirteen existed in the colony of Massachusetts at the time. During Wardwell's examination, Ephraim Foster testified that he found Samuel behind "Capt Bradstreet's house," in a sour mood. "[H]is discontent then was because he was in love with a maid named Barker who slighted his love."<sup>15</sup>

Though speculation exists that this woman was named Sarah, the only female Barker in the surrounding area was Hannah Barker, born in Andover to Richard and Joanna on October 21, 1652.<sup>16</sup> No official evidence exists to support Foster's claim of an affair; nevertheless it appears that Hannah was none other than the cousin of William Barker, Jr.. Given that Bradstreet's house was just up the road from the Barker's as well as Hannah's husband Christopher Osgood,<sup>17</sup> Foster may have found Wardwell soon after a visit to the girl he did not marry. At the very least, Wardwell's name had negative connotations within the Barker family, leaving him an easy target for a fourteen year old.

Another theory regarding the accusations levied against Samuel Wardwell and his family has to do with his wife, Sarah. Originally Sarah Hooper, she had married Adam

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gskw=&prox=1&f3=++16&db=mamarr&ti=0&ti.si=0&gl=&gss=mp-mamarr&gst=&so=3. According to Dignan and Robinson, the "maid Barker" mentioned in the testimony of Dudley Bradstreet is Sarah Barker, a cousin or daughter of Richard Barker Jr. However, a search of the Massachusetts Birth Records lists a Sarah Barker born to Richard and Hannah Barker in 1684, thus making her too young for the affair (Robinson has her listed as aged 25, but lists no source). However, a Sarah Barker is born to a John Barker (no wife listed) in 1679 in Concord, Mass.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds. *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, 3:783. Essex County Court Archives Vol. 2 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Vital Records of Andover, Massachusetts*. "Births: Surnames B to Bell." The Topsfield Historical Society, Topsfield, MA 1912: Listed as: "Hanna, d. Richard and Joanna, Oct. 21, 1656." The William Barker that testified against Samuel Wardwell is listed as William, s. William and Mary, Jan. 22, 1677, thus making him William, Jr.

<sup>17</sup> *Records of Andover, Massachusetts*. "Marriages: Surnames with O and P." Listed: "Christopher, and Hannah Barker, May 27, 1680."

Hawkes of Lynn, a sixty- three year old man of considerable wealth.<sup>18</sup> When he died just three years after their marriage, Sarah inherited “full possession of 188 acres of land and one-third of Samuel’s moveable property.”<sup>19</sup> Her daughter that she had with Adam, also named Sarah and referred to henceforth in this article as Sarah Jr., was awarded 90 pounds, “to be paid five pounds every two years until forty pounds is paid, and the fifty pounds at age or marriage.”<sup>20</sup> During the height of the witch trials, a law was passed in Massachusetts for attainder, or “the loss of civil, inheritance, and property rights for persons” convicted of witchcraft.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in such a small town setting, other members of the Andover community must have been aware of the Wardwell luck. Nevertheless, no testimony given against William or Sarah gives any indication of financial motives, unlike the apparent motives of the young Barker boy.

Samuel was indicted on two counts on September 15, 1692. First, it was charged that he “Maliciously and feloniously hath used practised & Exercised at and in the Towne of Boxford in the County of Essex aforesaid in upon and against one Martha Sprague.”<sup>22</sup> These accusations were broadened in the second indictment, which included among other charges, that “the Said Samuel Wardell with the Evill Speritt the Devill a Covenant did make Wherein he promised to honor Worship & beleive the devill Contra.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the attack on Wardwell was two-pronged in nature, encapsulating both the supposed attacks on Sprague and an overall commitment to the devil.

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<sup>18</sup> *Adam Hawkes of Saugus, Mass., 1605-1672*(Baltimore, 1980), 22-27. Karlsen, Carol F. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Karlsen, 105.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>22</sup> Essex County Archives, *Salem Witchcraft Papers* Vol. 3 Page 55.

<sup>23</sup> *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, Volume 3 Page 56.

The accusations levied by Martha Sprague and the other afflicted were typical of New England witchcraft cases. In particular, during her testimony before the grand jury on September 14, she accused Wardwell of “pinching & sticking pinse into her & striking: me downe, including the day before her testimony, when he “did greivously afflict me.”<sup>24</sup> Mary Walcott elaborated on these claims before the grand jury on the same day, as she affirmed that she saw “Sam’ll Wardwell or his Apperition pull Martha Spreag off from her horse...verily believes he did it by witchcraft.”<sup>25</sup> Yet Sprague also claimed in her grand jury testimony that Wardwell afflicted Rose Foster and Foster’s mother, a claim not substantiated by Martha’s father, Wardwell, or the women themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly enough, Sarah Wardwell used her husband as an excuse for causing Martha Sprague to become afflicted. In her confession, Sarah claimed to have afflicted Martha Sprague said because she “was ameans of taking up her husband & because he was gone from home & she much Vext at it.”<sup>27</sup> No further explanation is given as to Samuel’s whereabouts, but Sarah’s fixation on Sprague was most likely due to Martha’s involvement in Samuel’s arrest.<sup>28</sup>

The second indictment was based on a practice that Wardwell had been innocuously involved in for the years leading up to the trials, and something that he included in his confession. For years, Wardwell had been known to practice fortune telling. Ephraim Foster testified that Samuel told his wife “that she should have five gurls:

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<sup>24</sup> *SWP* Vol. 3 57

<sup>25</sup> *SWP* Vol. 3 57.

<sup>26</sup> *SWP* Vol. 3 57.

<sup>27</sup> *SWP* 68. Quote from Sarah Wardwell’s confession: Afflicting Martha Sparague “was ameans of taking up her husband & because he was gone from home & she much Vext at it”

<sup>28</sup> *SWP* 68. During her confession, Sarah Wardwell admitted that “she s'd she never new her husband to be a witch till she was such an one her self.”

before: she should: have: a son: which thing is come to pase.”<sup>29</sup> Abigail Martin, one of the girls claiming to be afflicted, witnessed Wardwell tell both John Farnom and James Bridges their fortunes.<sup>30</sup> John Bridges testified during Wardwell’s trial that he heard his daughter ponder, “I wonder how wordwall cold teell so true.”<sup>31</sup>

The testimony was not limited to the fortunes told. Foster also gave a description of Wardwell’s method of fortune telling, recounting that Samuel

would look in their hand: and then would Cast his  
Eyes down upon the ground allways before he told  
Eny thing this I have both seen and heard severall  
times: and about severall persons<sup>32</sup>

These dramatics performed by Wardwell surely lent credence to his ability to predict the future. While it appears that Samuel Wardwell was being sought out for his gift, none of those who testified against him displayed any sense of remorse for their own actions.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it appeared that Wardwell “mayd sport of it,” oftentimes entertaining the young folks in the area.<sup>34</sup>

Another theme of the accusations against the carpenter, and a theme of many witch accusations in New England, was his alleged ability to command animals.<sup>35</sup> While there is no presence of animal familiars common to other cases of witchcraft in Salem and Andover, Samuel Wardwell is painted as a man who was able to control the behavior of

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<sup>29</sup>SWP, 58.

<sup>30</sup>SWP., 62.

<sup>31</sup>SWP. 62.

<sup>32</sup>SWP. 58.

<sup>33</sup>SWP58, 62. At no point in the testimony do either Ephraim Foster or John Bridges express remorse for participating in supposedly magical games, and their witness testimonies to the games does not arouse any suspicion.

<sup>34</sup>SWP, 60. Thomas Chandler v. Samuel Wardwell.

<sup>35</sup>SWP. 9, 72. Ann Putnam v. Rebecca Nurse, Tituba v. Sarah Osbourne



animals. Upon seeing Wardwell behind Capt. Bradstreet's house, Foster claimed to see "the first Appearance of the catt." Ephraim Foster also claimed that Wardwell "could make cattle come to him when he pleased."<sup>36</sup>

Conversely, Samuel Wardwell's accusations against the Lilly and Tayler women centered on the death of his brother-in-law, William Hooper, who died in Reading on August 8, 1692.<sup>37</sup> In particular, Samuel accuses these women of being involved in a fire at William's house that took place during the funeral activities.

In the case of Jane Lilly<sup>38</sup>, Wardwell testified:

there was sever'l Gallans of wine that day  
prepared for W'm Hoopers buriall: that was Drunk  
up: and there was five shouts made in triumph at  
what they had done... when she went away from the  
firing of Hoopers hous but she s'd she was in her own  
hous all that time & that she never went: in body nor  
spirit nor had ever had any [inclynason] to witchcraft.

Thus, Wardwell accused Lilly and Tayler of drinking the wine reserved for his brother-in-law's burial and setting fire to the Hooper house. When he questioned her as to her whereabouts during the fire, Lilly claimed to have never left her house, and denied any ties to witchcraft.<sup>39</sup>

Wardwell was not alone in his accusations, as John Brown and Major Swayne both testified to seeing the house ablaze and Lilly near the scene.<sup>40</sup> With the time of William's

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<sup>36</sup> SWP58

<sup>37</sup> *Vital Records of Reading, Massachusetts*, "Reading Deaths," 532. Listed: "Hoopper, William, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1692."

<sup>38</sup> Norton, 324. n. 9 "Assumes 'Mary Lilly' is Jane, and 'Hannah' Tayler is Mary."

<sup>39</sup> *Suffolk Court Records* Page 52, Boyer and Nissenbaum Vol 3. 539, *Suffolk Court Records* Page 43, Boyer and Nissenbaum Vol. 3 741-742.

<sup>40</sup> *Suffolk Court Records* Page 52, Boyer and Nissenbaum, Vol. 3 539-540.

death and funeral so close to the proceedings, Samuel's incorporation of ill feelings toward the women in his testimony should not be surprising.

The theme of retribution for William carried into the examination of Mary Taylor, as Wardwell openly attacked the accused. After questioning her desire to harm his brother-in-law, he proceeded to hypothesize that the falling out between the two resulted from the fact that "Hooper took his child from s'd Tayler: that she had to suckle." That child, Ruth, was born in March of 1690/91,<sup>41</sup> thus making it likely that any disagreement Hooper and Tayler may have had over the child was still fresh in everyone's minds. He also made sure to accuse her of playing a part in "the firing the hous".<sup>42</sup>

However, something happened to Samuel Wardwell. Be it guilt or reason we may never know, but what we do know is that on September 13, 1692, the man who had spent the days accusing Lilly and Taylor as his associates in the devil fully recanted his statement. In the recantation, he acknowledged that his "Confession: was; taken: from his mouth and that he had said it" but "he s'd he belyed: himselfe he also s'd it was alone one: he: knew he should dye for it: whether: he ownd it or no."<sup>43</sup> Even as he recanted his confession on September 13, 1692, he must have known that it would make no difference. He was right, as he nevertheless faced the grand jury and a conviction in a trial the next day for the crimes he had so recently renounced. However, it is impossible to determine if he knew of the lethal danger in which he put himself, as up until his execution on September 22 no other confessor had been executed.

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<sup>41</sup> *Vital Records of Reading, Massachusetts*, "Reading Births," 129. Listed as: "Hoopper, Ruth, d. of William and Susannah, March 9, 1690-91."

<sup>42</sup> *Suffolk Court Records* Page 43, Boyer and Nissenbaum, Vol. 3 741-742.

<sup>43</sup> *Essex County Court Archives*: Volume Two 59.

Needless to say, the legacy of Samuel Wardwell in the witchcraft trials was a somber one. Six of the accused, including Mary Tyler and Samuel's neighbor Mary Osgood, signed a statement between October 1692 and their acquittals in January 1692/3 which said the following:

Some time after, when we were better composed, they telling us of what we had confessed, we did profess that we were innocent and ignorant of such things; and we hearing that Samuel Wardwell had renounced his confession, and quickly after condemned and executed, some of us were told that we were going after Wardwell .<sup>44</sup>

Instead of providing hope for those who confessed out of fear, the name of Samuel Wardwell became little more than a reminder to stick to one's original story.

Samuel Wardwell was hanged with seven women on September 22, 1692. As he was being prepared for his execution, he once again proclaimed his innocence just as a cloud of dust passed by. The presence of that cloud proved to be the last piece of evidence against him, causing a member of the audience to cry out, "The Devil Doth hinder his words."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Calef, Robert. *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. 375  
<http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=Bur5Nar.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=a>

<sup>45</sup> Fuess, Claude M. *Andover: Symbol of New England*. Andover and North Andover Historical Society: 1959 p. xiv and 480. Also see: Edward P Hamilton, "Andover: Symbol of New England," *New England Quarterly*, 1960.